



# **THE ETHOS OF THE INDIAN INDEPENDENCE STRUGGLE TODAY**

**ISMAIL MAHOMED**



**INDIAN COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL RELATIONS  
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# **The Ethos of the Indian Independence Struggle Today**

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## **The Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Memorial Lecture**

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations is an autonomous body set up by the Government of India in 1950 with a view to establishing, reviving and strengthening cultural relations between India and other countries. This aim is sought to be achieved through a broad range of activities.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the first President of the Council, was a multi-faceted personality; a great freedom fighter and an eminent scholar. Instituted in 1958 by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, as a mark of honour to the memory of Maulana Azad, the Azad Memorial Lectures are intended to contribute towards the promotion of better understanding among different peoples of the world. Eminent speakers from India and abroad are invited every year to speak on subjects of importance to humanity at large and, in particular, to the people of India.

The Council has been fortunate in having distinguished intellectuals and public figures deliver the Azad Memorial Lectures. The first lecture was delivered by the late Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India.

The 1998 Maulana Azad Memorial Lecture was delivered by Justice Ismail Mahomed, Chief Justice of South Africa and Namibia, on December 14, 1998.

The topic of the lecture was “**THE ETHOS OF THE INDIAN INDEPENDENCE STRUGGLE TODAY**”



# The Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Memorial Lecture

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**ADDRESS OF THE HON'BLE VICE-PRESIDENT  
OF INDIA OF THE OCCASION OF  
THE 1998 MAULANA ABUL KALAM AZAD  
MEMORIAL LECTURE**

It gives me great pleasure to preside over the 1998 Maulana Azad Memorial Lecture to be delivered by Justice Ismail Mahomed, Chief Justice of South Africa and Namibia.

The Indian Council of Cultural Relations under whose auspices these lectures are held was literally the child of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. He nurtured the institution during its initial years and set the direction for its future evolution.

The ideas and ideals of the late Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, one of the towering personalities of the twentieth century, his multi-faceted contributions as an intellectual and freedom fighter, continue to inspire us all. Maulana Azad was unwavering in his stand on the creation of a secular and modern India, where citizens of all religions and communities would co-exist with full human dignity. His views on India's freedom and its unity which had taken shape before the emergence of Gandhiji, further evolved under Gandhi's guidance and leadership. He visualised a mutually supportive role for the two principal communities of the sub-continent—the Hindus and the Muslims. In September 1923, while delivering the presidential address of the special session of Indian

National Congress, he said about Hindu-Muslim unity, "not only is our national freedom impossible without it, we cannot create without it primary principles of humanity within ourselves..." He represented both through his statements as also his deeds, the finest traditions of Indian heritage. Jawaharlal Nehru often commented that there was in the Maulana Sahib an understanding of the "urges of today and a modern outlook", which made him the man he was. Religion, as faith for Maulana Azad, was an "essential and integral part" of India's national psyche. As he bluntly put it "secularism and toleration were not merely negative virtues of bearing with others, who differed from him, but a positive quality marked by love and reverence for all human beings."

To Maulana Sahib, the preservation of our traditions, and at the same time, assimilation of modern ideas and thought, and all that was of value from other traditions was the ideal that an Independent and United India needed to strive for. To again quote from one of his speeches made in November 1949 at a UNESCO seminar: "India had been at her best when her doors were wide open to all who came from abroad. She freely partook of whatever lessons the world had to teach and equally freely gave the world her best."

The Maulana was fond of highlighting what he regarded as a vital Quranic passage regarding the different paths to the one God. I give his own rendering of that passage:

“We have set for each (group) of you a particular code and path. Had God so willed, He could have made you one people, but He tests you by the separate regulations which he has made for you...So (do not lose yourself in these differences but) endeavour to surpass each other through your good deeds.”

This year when we have completed celebrating the Golden Jubilee of our independence, it is only befitting that the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Lecture should be delivered by the head of the Judiciary of South Africa, Justice Ismail Mahomed, on the subject of “The Ethos of the Indian Independence Struggle Today”.

Justice Mahomed represents a country which is dear to us and with which we share our passion for establishing a just and equitable order in the world. His is a country where Gandhiji perfected the tools and techniques of mass action which eventually liberated India from foreign bondage. South Africa is and will remain special to all Indians. We are aware Mr. Chief Justice of your keen interest in India and the way our country is coping up with the challenges of the new emerging world order in the light of its own Gandhian legacy of the freedom movement. In your visits to our country, you would have noticed that modern India possesses enough moral, intellectual and physical resources to progress without compromising with values. The legacy of Gandhi and Maulana is with us to guide our actions and give us strength. Your reflections on India from someone who does

not suffer from the handicaps of an insider will of inestimable value.

I have great pleasure in inviting Justice Ismail Mahomed to deliver this lecture on “The Ethos of the Indian Independence Struggle Today”

## **THE ETHOS OF THE INDIAN INDEPENDENCE STRUGGLE TODAY**

I am deeply conscious of the honour and the privilege accorded to me by the Vice-President of India to deliver the Maulana Azad Memorial Lecture this year. To speak in the memory of Abul Kalam Azad, is to pay homage to a great man, a gifted writer, an eloquent orator, a deep thinker, a committed Islamic scholar, a versatile political philosopher and a courageous soul. But it involves much more than a homage to even all these personal riches. It involves also a celebration of the great ethos of the struggle for the independence of India which sustained Maulana in his finest hour.

It is an ethos which has in crucial times, mediated the destiny of a great civilisation originating in antiquity, and substantially unbroken through the ages, which has radiated its influence in many lands and across many oceans. This ethos has been challenged in momentous periods by forces of awesome power. It has responded to such challenges sometimes with glory and other times with agony and pain—but the core of the ethos has never been totally vanquished at the worst of times.

It is not a static ethos. It is perhaps best identified through its modern expression in that incredibly significant century which began with the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa in 1893 and ended with the triumphant vindication of Nelson Mandela in that country in 1994. Its identification,

consolidation, continuing resilience, and persistent pursuit is perhaps more crucial today than at any other time, on a planet in which our species has manifestly acquired an unprecedented capacity to navigate the mysteries of the heavens beyond and to bring discovery and excitement to our lives; but also the awesome capacity to destroy the civilisation which has made this possible and to annihilate the conditions which sustain it.

What are the most identifiable and the most crucial features of this ethos? What *is* this ethos which gave to the Indian independence struggle during this century a majesty and a power arguably unequalled in beauty and passion in all modern history. What *is* there in this ethos which enabled India to produce a Mahatma Gandhi, a Jawaharlal Nehru or a Abul Kalam Azad or which enabled South Africa to produce a Nelson Mandela?

The ethos is perhaps best understood not by seeking to define it, but by identifying four very simple but potentially very potent strains within the ethos, and the rich interaction between them, to which the struggle for the independence of India at its height gave so towering an expression of rare magnificence.

The first is an abiding fidelity to the *universalism* of our species. It is deeply rooted in Indian history. Many and sometimes bewilderingly diverse have been the races and the colours, the languages and the dialects, the religions and the philosophies, the traditions and the

habits, and the temperaments and the instincts, of the millions upon millions who have come to inhabit and make India their home, over the centuries. But they have all coalesced creatively to give to the Indian nation a core and creative identity which is universal. Aryan and Dravidian, Muslim and Hindu, Sikh and Parsi, Buddhist and Christian—have all become part of the rich mosaic of Indian universalism which brings cohesion and purpose to Indians internally and which radiates externally-across immediate political boundaries towards what must in a fundamental and intimate sense remain their brothers and sisters in the gullies and the fields of Bangladesh, Pakistan and beyond. The depths of this universalising strain in the ethos which informed the struggle for India's independence manifested itself unmistakably during crucial episodes of tragedy and triumph—during the Khilafat movement and after Jallianwala Bagh, during the great Salt march and the Quit India movement and during War and famine. It was a strain with important political advantages but the essential energy which generated its sustenance and power was much deeper in the Indian psyche. In the case of Abul Kalam Azad it was an article of faith compelled by his conception of God himself in that magnificent commentary in *Tarjuman-al-Quran*. God he says is Rabb-ul-Alamin, the Lord of all creation and the sustainer of all life. He has the universal character of divine concern for every individual, group, community, and country, and every form of existence. There is no place in this concept for any form of

exclusiveness. Fundamentally, all religions are knit in a tide of unity, all the Prophets and the great spiritual leaders who have appeared in different times have invited people to the same path. Maulana Azad was deeply committed to the Koranic revelation which proclaims that

“All the messengers of God, at whatever place or time they were born, were all invited to the same path, they all were the heralds to the same law of righteousness.”

The commitment to this abiding truth was fundamental to the soul of Azad. It even transcended his fierce and passionate commitment to the immediate independence of India. That agony has been immortalised in those famous words which proclaimed:

“Even if an angel from heaven was to appear and to proclaim from the height of the Qutab Minar, that we can achieve Swaraj or independence within twenty-four hours provided India foregoes Hindu-Muslim unity I would rather give up Swaraj, than accept this division. Because if Swaraj is delayed it will be a loss to India but if we lose our unity there will be a loss for the entire human race.”

Much the same kind of agony is articulated in the autobiographical introspections of Mahatma Gandhi himself.

This universalist strain in the ethos finds immortal expression in the great poetry of Mirza Ghalib and Rabindranath Tagore, in that wondrous and vibrant unity

in diversity which is so conspicuously Indian; in the coalescing emotional synergies of ordinary Indians in thousands of little villages all over and across the sub-continent; in the identification of the basic features of the Indian State within its Constitution and through the insistence by the Supreme Court that the commitment to those basic features is irreversible and constitutionally immune from legislative or executive penetration.

The second strain in this ethos is the temper of *democracy*. Like the strain of universalism its roots are also deeply embedded within the Indian psyche. Passionate argument and intense debate, incessant intellectual effervescence and vigorous dissent, fluctuating discourse and continually unfolding horizons, endless consultation, and mutating states of consensus, thesis, antithesis and synthesis are all central to the Indian character. It was the basic temper which informed the crusading journalism of Azad, the passionate scepticism of Nehru, and the magic of Gandhiji in identifying unerringly the very pulse of India in the struggle against foreign rule. Indians, both ancient and modern, who have ignored this truth have ultimately been punished with devastation by Indians themselves.

The formal commitment to democracy, has of course a distinguished pedigree and it has in modern times become part of the very vocabulary of a credible civilisation. But what is unprecedented is the demographic scale within which it has to be

accommodated and nurtured in India. A constitutional and substantially unbroken commitment to structure the future of a population of nearly one billion people with diverse demands, on the basis of a vigorous and credible Constitutional democracy is an affirmative commitment of faith without a historical peer. It has deep implications for India itself, for the sub-continent of which it is so important a part, and ultimately for the sustainable future of all humankind.

Moreover it comes with a third and very special strain located within the very bowels of the struggle for the independence of India. This is the commitment to social and economic justice—not simply as an amorphous philosophical value casting its benign shadow on the deliberations of well meaning public figures; but as a constitutionally articulated and jurisprudentially identified legal construct making the courts, the law and the lawyers crucial and creative actors within the arena of social and distributive justice. Debates concerning the extent of its actual achievements can be intense, acrimonious, even agonising; but the intensity of the agony is a measure of the depth of this strain within the ethos.

The universalist, the democratic and social justice strains which manifest themselves in the great Indian struggle for independence, constitute what can conveniently be classified as the *secular* component of the ethos, although it is in many cases indirectly energised by other influences. But in its most complete and potent form the

ethos is also informed both by a moral and a spiritual strain deeply entrenched in Indian thought and instinct.

The *moral* strain compels two important consequences. The first is the test which it requires to be applied in identifying the correct choice—nationally and internationally, individually and collectively—between competing alternatives. The test is not what is in the best interest of the group making the choice or what is the most expedient, or what is the most convenient or even what is the most popular. The test is what is *morally* correct? This is an exacting, often agonising test, made all the more painful when the answers are often so much more complex and nuanced than the question sometimes suggests.

The second important consequence of the moral strain in the ethos is that it compels a special discipline in the choice of *means* for the attainment of morally legitimate ends. Again the test is not whether the means identified will be the quickest, or the most convenient, or the most expedient for the attainment of legitimate ends. The test is whether the chosen mean is *itself* morally and ethically legitimate, regardless of the morality of the end which it is sought to attain. This test again compels excruciating debate and introspection with enormous implications for the agencies of progressive social change, but it is undoubtedly a very crucial part of the ethos. Its legacy must, to a substantial degree at least, explain the quite incredible moral energy and passion with which India

sought—nationally and internationally, to attack the crassness and brutality of apartheid in South Africa over a period of some five decades and unilaterally to impose economic sanctions against that country regardless of its own immediate self interest.

But perhaps what gives to the ethos of the Indian struggle for independence its very special and most enduring identity—beyond impact of its secular and even its moral components—is its *spiritual* strain. It elevates the ethos to a special dimension, integrating and weaving all other strains into a single holistic approach to humanity itself, its potential and limitations, the rights and duties it generates, its relationship with nature and its place in the cosmos. It is at once simple and complex, integrated and diverse, and in its highest expression, infinitely ennobling and beautiful. Its philosophical, religious and secular implications are profound. It generates crucial truths. Among them is the truth that within each human there resides a spark of divinity; that every human person has an equal claim to dignity which is inalienable; that the spirit within each of us is matured and elevated by exercising our capacity for love towards others; that we grow in the act of giving and sharing; and that the act of giving and sharing is crucial for the emancipation of the giver himself.

Thus integrated and harmonised, the universalist, the democratic, the social justice, the moral and the spiritual strains within this ethos of the Indian struggle for

independence have a compelling beauty and power. Does the ethos become less compelling or less legitimate because of widespread expressions of shameless brutality, obscene cruelty and wanton destruction which manifested themselves at crucial times during and after that struggle? I believe not. It is crucial to distinguish between the power and the legitimacy of the ethos and the disgraceful deviations which confronted it. The confrontation did not diminish its legitimacy or power, it enhanced it. It did not make it less imperative. It made it more imperative.

Has that ethos lost its relevance because of the passage of time? Has it now become much too remote or too abstract or too demanding sensibly to inform the responses of a civilization dominated by unprecedented technological aggression with the dawn of the new century? I believe not. The values to which the ethos sought to give expression are fundamental to the human condition. They are neither parochial nor temporal. They cannot be frozen within the boundaries of a single political state or within the parameters of a single historical episode. The song remains infinitely greater than the singers who sometimes give expression to it.

Indeed, now more than ever the essentials of the ethos compel both an analytical and a pragmatic re-examination of some of the most fundamental institutions and premises which regulate our civilization and mediate its values.

Crucial in this regard is our continuing formal commitment to the doctrine of absolute national sovereignty as the basic block upon which relations between nations are to be premised. This was historically a necessary, perhaps inevitable, consequence of the emergence of the Nation-State in modern history. But it raises at least three questions which need urgently to be pursued very early in the century bringing the new millennium. Firstly, can an inflexible and ritualistic commitment to the doctrine of national sovereignty continue to be viable under the massive impact of the unprecedented revolution in information technology, fickle and accelerating monetary and intellectual mobility across political frontiers, manifestly unequal balances in international economic and military power, and corrosively softening borders? How much of the doctrine reflects core reality and how much the residue of a legal fiction rapidly corroded by other forces? Secondly, can the doctrine continue to command moral legitimacy in the new century? Can it continue to provide the cement to bond our civilization? Is it going to be consistent with the universalist, the moral and the spiritual strains in the ethos which I have sought to identify? And if it is not, how can the nascent and embryonic institutions of world order be adapted and structured justly and effectively to accommodate such strains. And thirdly: what regional initiatives can effectively be pursued to prepare humanity for such a more viable universalist future?

This third question opens potentially very exciting and creative opportunities for a renaissance India acting with fidelity to the great ethos which gave it its modern birth. Indians share with their brothers and sisters in Pakistan, Bangladesh and in other parts of South Asia, rich and deep cultural traditions—literature and poetry, language and rituals, music and food—and experiences in tragedy and triumph, forged over centuries of toil and sweat, labour and love, tears and laughter. That which unites them is infinitely bigger, more creative, more expansive, than that which can divide them. If the English and the French, Germans and Greeks, Portugese and Spaniards, torn by War and conflict for so long can come together to mediate and to temper their own individual destinies through a shared ethos articulated in an instrument of fundamental human rights and adjudicated by an objective tribunal binding on all, is there any reason why a South—Asian Charter of Human Rights and a South Asian Court of Human Rights can also not do so in this region with far greater reason? Is there any reason why Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and a potentially glorious South Asian humanity, watered by the same great rivers, presided by the majesty of the same ageless Himalayas, and pulsating with the same rich history, and dreams, cannot synergise their rich economic and human resources, and their incredible cultural and trade potential into a free and mighty common economic and cultural community of equals, bringing peace, hope and romance to their own children and to the world beyond?

But such creative regional initiatives need not be confined to South Asia alone. The new South Africa shares in substance much of the ethos which informed the Indian struggle for independence. Indeed, it could forcibly be argued that it is in South Africa that the ethos in its most potent and creative form had both its genesis and its most triumphant moment of maturity in modern history. Gandhiji in South Africa at the turn of the century was its historical genesis. Nelson Mandela towards the end of the century was its ultimate triumph.

What is beyond argument, in any event, is the depth of the interest which both these countries have in the development of an ethos which must be crucial for the sustenance and the evolution of a defensible civilisation in the next century and beyond. The Constitutions of both India and South Africa manifest eloquent strains of universalism, democracy, social justice and moral and spiritual imperatives which give expression to their own struggles against the brutality of racism and the repression harnessed to sustain it against legitimate attack. The shores of both countries are kissed and caressed by the same Indian Ocean. Both are leading members of the same Non-Aligned Movement initiated by Jawaharlal Nehru at Bandung in 1955 and now led by Nelson Mandela. Both countries have economic, mining, manufacturing and agricultural capacities and human resources susceptible to rich, synergising initiatives. Both share a deep interest in restructuring the international

institutions of political and economic order to reflect priorities, needs and perspectives which will increasingly come to be seen to be very different from those perceived by their founders at the end of the last War.

South-South collaboration can become a very potent force in mobilising the potential of a shared ethos to respond effectively in the new century and beyond to challenges fundamental to our common humanity.

There are many such challenges. Is the fundamental state of the international political and economic order in which we now live substantially consistent with the imperatives of the ethos which I have described? Can the embryonic institutions of international governance and discipline initiated after the end of the War be fairly described as democratic? Is the distribution of international political and economic power equitable? Are there effective controls against the abuse of economic and military power among nations? Is the culture which informs our consumption of natural and energy resources defensible or sustainable? Is it a culture which gives expression to our need and our capacity to love, to give, to share and to grow in the act of giving? The short and truthful answer to these questions must substantially be in the negative.

Effective political, economic and military power within and outside the organs of international governance and influence is dominated overwhelmingly by the developed

and industrialised regions of the world consisting of some one billion people. The other 4.4 billion live in the developing countries. Almost a third of these people have no access to clean water; a quarter do not have any adequate housing; a fifth have no access to modern health services or enough dietary energy and protein; more than 1.3 billion people live on less than one dollar a day. Two billion people in the world are chronically anaemic. Life for millions continues to be disgracefully "nasty, brutish and short".

Unless there is a revolution in the management, control and distribution of our resources, the future looks even more grim for millions. Over a period of only seventy years the human population has grown from 1.8 billion to 5.5 billion. Even with massive declines in human fertility, the human population will grow to 12 billion before the end of the next century. Nearly eleven of these 12 billion will live in the developing, wickedly poor, substantially southern regions of the world, desperately competing for survival, with resources dangerously depleted by a small minority obsessively driven by a culture of materialism and sterile consumerism.

The inequalities in consumption are obscene. Twenty per cent of the world's population in the highest income countries account for eighty-six per cent of the total private consumption expenditure. The poorest twenty per cent consume 1.3 per cent of that expenditure. The richest fifth consume fifty-eight per cent of total energy,

the poor only four per cent. The richest twenty per cent consume eighty-four per cent of all paper, the poorest twenty per cent, only 1.1 per cent. The richest twenty per cent own eighty per cent of the world's vehicle fleet, the poorest less than one per cent.

The culture of consumerism feverishly pursued by this minority brings neither happiness nor spiritual nourishment for its members. The percentage of Americans calling *themselves* happy has declined since 1957 but consumption in that period has more than doubled. It exacts a heavy toll on our resources. The combustion of fossil fuels it requires must within only 50 years, lead to a sea level rise of 20 to 30 centimetres—enough to force the removal of hundreds of millions of pathetically poor people from their homes and the abandonment of huge islands of human settlement. 2.7 million people die from air pollution every year. Eighty per cent of these come from the poor in developing countries. The conditions of the poor and the wretched will get increasingly desperate with the demands made by this rampant consumerism each year. Rationally and sensitively used there are enough riches in our environment for our legitimate need but not for our crass and self destructive greed.

Grinding poverty, disempowering illiteracy, chronic malnutrition and untreated disease have for generations brought pain and suffering to its victims. It diminishes all of us in our humanity. It compromises our morality and invades our spirituality. Good and decent people moved

by such suffering have sometimes contended that we are condemned to endure its agony; that it is intractable; that it is too massive and deeply entrenched, and that we simply do not have the resources to confront it effectively. Noble as it might be, the ethos of the struggle for the independence of India, it is said, is impotent to meet the awesome power of this conquering pathology.

If all this was true, it might make a state of compassionate despair a permissible alternative for some. But is it true? Mahatma Gandhi and Maulana Azad would argue that it is not. And they would be right. The statistical evidence is devastating. The estimated additional annual cost to achieve basic education for all is six billion dollars; consumers in the United States spend eight billion dollars on cosmetics every year. The annual cost of water and sanitation for all would be nine billion dollars; eleven billion dollars is spent annually in Europe on ice cream. Basic health and nutrition would need thirteen billion dollars annually; smokers in Europe spend sixteen billion dollars annually on cigarettes. The annual cost of providing reproductive health for all women would be twelve million dollars; alcoholic drinks in Europe cost a hundred and five billion dollars. And military spending in the world alone consumes a staggering seven hundred and eighty billion dollars. How can we pretend that the continuing and brutal levels of poverty and homelessness, malnutrition and starvation, disease and illiteracy, and piercing assaults on the dignity of large segments of humankind is

simply the result of inadequate resources? And in any event what have material sources to do with the degrading humiliation and the shameful injustices we have inflicted on the victims of gender and racial discrimination simply because so many minds have been infected by blind and irrational prejudice and so many souls have been impoverished by a corroding meanness of spirit?

Many of the agonies generated by such questions have been with us since the industrial revolution with its unprecedented consequences for the political, economic, philosophical, and moral condition of the civilisation it sought to accelerate. But the exponential growth in the technological domination of that civilisation which has been unleashed in the last decade or two, with the promise of a dramatic escalation into the new century, could irreversibly propel this civilisation into a crisis of destiny manifestly and demonstrably incomparable with any previous crisis known to history.

This crisis arises because our technological mastery of the non-human environment in our civilisation has for the first time created the real possibility of unfolding and accelerating, within a reasonably foreseeable period of time, two very different scenarios with massive implications for the future of humanity.

The first scenario is pessimistic. It rests substantially on three propositions. The first is the proposition that our

technological mastery of nature has given to our species the irreversible power to destroy itself, leaving the control and habitation of this planet to forms of life, and to vegetation and to social insects conceivably more ancient than man but without his potential for abstract thought, moral trauma or spiritual insight. The second proposition is that there will continue to be a manifest and accelerating discrepancy between the realisation of man's capacity for technological creativity and aggression and the development of his moral and spiritual potential to absorb their consequences. The third proposition is that this discrepancy will end in tragedy. Man will realise his capacity to destroy himself. The civilisation which had painfully evolved over millions of years will be inherited perhaps by insects with a much less exciting but a more stable potential.

The alternative scenario is more optimistic. It also rests effectively on three propositions. The first is that the triumph of the technological revolution has now made us so completely the masters of non-human nature as to create the conditions necessary for the final liberation of man from what has for so long appeared to be its awesome and intimidating destructive power, that technology will empower our species with the capacity to reverse the consequences of pestilence, poverty and disease and to enable its members to confront nature with dignity and confidence. The second proposition is that this capacity for liberation, will also enhance our capacity for happiness, and

our enjoyment and understanding of the mystery and the beauty of the universe. The third proposition is that we will come increasingly to realise that capacity by an increasing and mutating state of moral and spiritual maturity supported both by our control over the destructive powers of nature and the opportunities generated for the acquisition of knowledge and learning and the truths generated by them.

Professor Arnold Toynbee, Paul Kennedy and Allen Tough among modern philosophers and historians have recognised and confronted both these scenarios with their awesome potential for relatively imminent realisation. Professor Tough says that the struggle between the forces involved in the two scenarios is a titanic struggle and describes this conflict in dramatic terms. "Human civilisation today," he says

"Is vibrant, powerful, flourishing, rapidly changing, deeply concerned. Developed over thousands of years, it has now spread to every region of our planet and occasionally to other bodies in our solar system...

If we look ahead a few decades, we note that our civilisation has enormous potential not only to flourish happily but also to deteriorate appallingly. In fact, humanity literally has the capacity to exterminate itself, thus joining the many other species that have become extinct. However, our civilisation also has the capacity to avoid the worst dangers and to flourish peacefully for thousands of years. At this peculiar moment in human

history, our two extreme potentials (for destroying everything and for achieving a highly positive future) may both be vaster than at any time during the past 10,000 years.

The actual outcome will result from human choices and actions over the next few months, years and decades...On the grand scale of some ancient cosmic myth, our worldwide civilisation today is engaged in a titanic struggle. This vast human drama being played on our global stage may be the most important and exciting drama in our entire galaxy at the present time. Each of us plays some small but nontrivial part in this drama.

Both sets of forces in the struggle are powerful, pervasive, and probably increasing...

What will be the outcome? Will this global-scale drama have a happy ending? Will it turn into a sombre Shakespearean tragedy with dead bodies littering the stage?"

The last possibility postulated by Professor Tough must bring deep pain to every human mind and strike terror in every human heart. But its triumph is not inevitable. Fidelity to the core of the ethos which inspired the Indian struggle for independence in its finest hours can mobilise massive and creative forces propelling our civilisation in a direction which is exciting and rich and which elevates the human condition to new levels of fulfilment, maturity and excellence.

The universalism in the ethos can synergise the energies of *all* humans, the democratic temper which informs it could sustain their enthusiastic participation, the commitment to social and economic justice could release from suffocation massive capacities within our species; it could generate learning and better understanding about humans and their rights and obligations, and it could accelerate new values and sensitivities to the environment which sustains us and in the directions in which we need to grow and mature. The moral content of that ethos could cement those values and give it stability and depth. But perhaps above all, the spiritual dimension in the ethos could arguably mutate us into a new form of species which would come from the maturity of knowing that each of us is indeed his brothers' keeper; that there is neither glory or fulfilment in the compulsive pursuit of material riches; that there is a dangerous state of spiritual aridness which is generated by the culture of consumerism which insidiously corrupts our civilisations; that real fulfilment lies in the growth of the spirit within us and the reverence this compels for all life; that this reverence demands a loving relationship with the environment which sustains us; that brutality and violence between humans, among nations and towards the potentially benign forces of nature is wicked and destructive; that it subverts our capacity to enjoy the incredible richness and beauty, the poetry and the literature and the music and the learning which comes to us through the gift of life and that it obstructs in the last

instance our capacity for transcendence from the limitations of the material to the infinity of the spirit. We celebrate and we weep with these truths as we remember Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.

These truths and more are part of the legacy of the struggle for India's independence which it has bequeathed to its children. It is a rich legacy. It is sometimes challenged with wickedness and persistence but is deeply embedded within the psyche of the nation. It does not belong to India alone. It is universal and ageless. It legitimises our humanity for all of us. It ennobles us and transcends us. It is critically and precariously poised. May harm never come to the India which seeks to defend and to sustain it.

